

Safford Church of Christ

3888 S Hwy 191, Safford, AZ 85546

8 March 2015

Topics

A.M. Bible Class:

A call to persevere (Hebrews 10:19f)

A.M. Lesson:

The New Jerusalem (Revelation 21)

P.M. Lesson:

God promises his love to us (1 John 2:28-3:10)

Wednesday:

More than conquerors (Romans 8:28f)

Pulpit Evangelist

Ken Knowlton: 428-3494

Elders

Greg Briggs: 428-8756

John Cunningham: 428-0895

Sunday Bible Class	10:00 A.M.
Sunday Morning Worship	11:00 A.M.
Sunday Evening Worship	6:30 P.M.
Wednesday Evening Class	6:30 P.M.
Thursday Ladies Bible Class	11:00 A.M.

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!" Psalm 122:2

The Bible and the church

Jack Cottrell. <http://jackcottrell.com>

QUESTION: My Roman Catholic friend says that the Bible is not our final authority. Rather, the Church itself (understood as the Catholic Church) is our final authority because the church is actually the source or origin of the Bible. My friend points out that there was a period of time after Pentecost when there was no Bible. All truth came through the apostles, who taught orally long before the Bible itself was written and compiled. This oral teaching was the original authoritative truth; it is still passed along to us in the form of tradition. Thus we must say that the church is "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). And the church's authoritative truth thus exists in two forms: tradition and the Bible, with tradition actually having the priority. Do you have any thoughts on this?

ANSWER: The basic flaw in this argument is that Catholicism does not make the necessary distinction between the apostles and the church. They proceed on the assumption that the apostles were the first generation of the hierarchical structure (levels of authority) of the church, and that all subsequent rulers (their term) of the church have the same authority as the apostles. In fact, in many ways within Catholicism, the ordained hierarchy from the pope down to the local priesthood IS the church.

This equation of apostolic authority with the authority of the ongoing church hierarchy as such is what leads to the idea that the church is the source of the Bible and in fact has an authority that is higher than that of the Bible. The fact is that in Catholicism, the church has replaced the Bible as the ultimate authority.

How can we refute such devastating errors? Here I will point to two main Bible texts. First, we must consider Ephesians 2:19-22 (NASB): "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." There can be no question that here Paul is talking about the church, calling it "God's household," the "whole building," a "holy temple," and "a dwelling of God." And he says specifically that this structure is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." (Here "prophets" refers to NT prophets, or those early Christians who received the gift of prophecy. See Ephesians 3:5; 4:11.)

What we learn from this is that we must distinguish between the foundation of the church, and the church itself. The foundation upon which the church is built begins with Jesus Christ, who as

the cornerstone is the benchmark or guarantee that the rest of the foundation will be truly laid. The rest of the foundation is comprised of those appointed by Jesus to fill that role, namely, “apostles and prophets.” Both apostles and prophets are those who received truth-gifts from the Holy Spirit, being inspired by the Spirit to speak inspired messages from God (John 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 3:5; 4:11). This is the sense in which they are the foundation of the church. Their teaching is the blueprint (authoritative instruction) in accordance with which the church as a figurative building is constructed.

We cannot equate the apostles (and prophets) with the church as such. The church as it has existed from the beginning is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets. The church is not the same as the foundation on which it is built.

The second Bible text that refutes the Catholic claim that the church is the source and guarantee of infallible truth is 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” This text shows that we do not need a continuing authoritative oral tradition passed along through Catholicism for the ongoing growth and work of the church. Scripture—God’s truth in WRITTEN form—is profitable and adequate for this purpose.

Here is the key error of the Catholic view of authority. Catholicism equates the original authority of the apostles with what they consider to be the continuing authority of the hierarchy of the Catholic church. This is completely false. The original authority of the apostles continues today in the form of their writings (along with the writings of others, like Mark, Luke, and Jude, who had the gift of prophecy), which we possess and which we call The New Testament. When we use the NT as our sole and final authority, we are continuing to build the church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, in accord with Ephesians 2:20. The authority of the original apostles is equivalent today only to the authority of the Bible, not to some alleged authority of any church.

In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul states that “the church of the living God” is “the pillar and support of the truth.” Sometimes the word here translated “support” is instead translated as “foundation” (Knox version, with the Catholic “*imprimatur*”), or “ground” (Douay-Rheims Bible, the semi-official Catholic version). Catholics sometimes use this verse to try to verify the claim that their church is the origin (foundation) of authoritative truth, such as the Bible.

We should note that Paul says first that the church is the “pillar” of the truth. This is different from “foundation.” As the pillar of truth, the church is responsible for strongly holding high the truth in a world full of lies and relativism. Paul then says the church is the *edraiōma* of the truth. This is the only use of this noun in the NT, though the related adjective (*edraios*) is used three times. The fact is that this word does NOT mean “foundation” (contra the NIV). It means a firm and steadfast “holding up” of the truth, something that keeps it from falling or toppling, i.e., a “support” (NASB) or “buttress” (ESV) or “bulwark” (NRSV). The church is that which “protects and defends the truth against the confusion of myths” (E. Stauffer, in G. Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the NT*, II:364).

In other words, 1 Timothy 3:15 does not support the Catholic view that “the church” is the origin of the Bible, or that it is in any sense on a higher level of authority than the Bible. It says nothing at all about the origin or source of truth. It simply says that it is the church’s responsibility to be the firm and dependable voice of God’s truth in the world.

News:

Joy Gibson is undergoing radiation treatments.

Brian Miller, friend of Mark and Jen Cavasos, is not well.

Billy Martin requests prayers for her friend **Rose**.

Pete Waller’s mother **Mary Waller** broke her knee.

Jimmy Johnson has gone to be with the Lord. Funeral services will be at the church building on March 31 at 3:00 P.M.

The **Copper Corridor Churches of Christ Family Reunion** will be on Saturday, March 28 at the San Pedro Valley Lion’s Club in Mammoth, AZ. From 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.

Fellowship meal is next Sunday after services.

Prayer List:

Joy Gibson—cancer treatments

Tatyana Knowlton—macular degeneration

Ken Cocke—back and shoulder pains

Janet Radar—nursing home

H.L. Boling—general health and complications from leukemia

Mike Cavasos—constant pain. Foot surgeries.

Sandy Cavasos—degenerative disk disease

Nic and Ani Self—health and personal needs

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